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## THE PHILADELPHIA COMMERCIAL MUSEUM.

MERCANTILE pursuits have now attained a prestige and a relative magnitude which they scarcely ever possessed at any other period of the world's history. Evidence accumulates on all sides to show that in the future increasing power and influence are to be the prerogative of the merchant and banker. From the point of view of the history of nations, it may be said that the great community of the world's traders has become all-powerful and most influential in the furtherance of good or evil. The national fate of untold millions hangs from their mercantile adaptability, depend from their "purchasing power" and their accessibility to the barterer and trader. No longer do the nations of the world derive their antagonisms, their feuds, and their hatreds from dynastic quibbles and religious bickerings. The cudgels of the nations are now wielded because of trade privileges, commercial discrimination, and mercantile disaffection. Civilization now spreads not through the search of heathens but through the quest for buyers, and the need for the savage's wares. Diplomacy has learned to use its wiles to further the merchant's interests, and the cannon's roar but proclaims the insistence and the indignation of the traders.

It is the incentive of the merchant which brings about the best results that accrue from progress in natural science, in technology and in transportation. More than ever before the choice of the buyer is being widened, the scope of the seller extended. The local market has all but disappeared, and in its place, one big mart, that of the world has been substituted. In a constantly growing degree, the commercial enterprises of the world contribute by means of fiscal taxation to that support of the state which enables it to discharge its civilizing duties and to execute its pacificatory intentions.

With the growing importance of commerce and the sharpening of commercial competition, there has sprung up everywhere in civilized countries a greater desire for commercial knowledge and information. It is worthy of notice that the great trading nations are urging upon their governments the necessity of closer attention to commercial education, and are insisting upon the devotion of national funds to the furtherance of interest in mercantile intelligence and information. It is a matter for constant attention and frequent complaint that, whereas

it is comparatively easy to acquire knowledge in all branches of technology, industry, agriculture, and forestry, it is most difficult to acquire a satisfactory insight into the characteristics and conditions of the world's commerce and commercial resources. This lack of facilities for obtaining commercial information of a practical, scientific character is in no small degree due to the absence of recognized national institutions devoted to tuition in these special branches. And yet the education of the successful merchant and of his assistants must be of a high order, and must cover an intimate acquaintance with the world's wants, the world's products and their application. The desire to cover this want for information has found expression in the creation of Commercial Museums. These institutions bid fair to become the most valuable means of keeping pace with the freer and more active commercial movement all over the civilized world; in a word, to furnish that preparation which is considered essential in every other field of human exertion and activity.

It would take us beyond the scope of this paper to trace the history of the various commercial museums extant or to discover where and by whom the original conception of such an institution was formed. Whether in Brussels, or in London, or in Vienna is immaterial as far as we are immediately concerned. As far as this country is affected the term "Commercial Museum" is synonymous with the institution in the Quaker City. Philadelphia has once again demonstrated the injustice of casting any reflection upon her rate of progress. The term "Museum" as applied to the institution in Philadelphia is misleading. Its scope and functions extend far beyond those usually associated with museums: it might more aptly be termed a center of intelligence on all matters appertaining to international commerce. It is unnecessary to review the conditions under which this institution started or to advert to the work which it was originally intended to fulfill. Suffice it to say that the original conception—that of forming a purely instructive collection of commercial products—has long since been outgrown, and has been superseded by an idea far more grandiose and wide-reaching: the *raison d'être* of the Philadelphia Commercial Museum as it now stands is primarily the general extension of the foreign interchange and commerce of the United States.

In order that one may fully appreciate the usefulness of an institution of this kind, and especially to this country, it is necessary to place one's self in the position of the American manufacturer who, finding

himself outstripping the absorptive powers of the home market, experiences a growing difficulty in selling his wares and turns his thought to foreign fields in the hope of diminishing the ever-increasing domestic congestion. Straightway this manufacturer perceives that his untutored mind blocks the way: he has heard that wares similar to those he makes are liked abroad. He believes his own products could find favor there and yet he knows not how to market his own manufactures. He is like one in a labyrinth, confident that an exit exists but not knowing how to find it. How is a manufacturer, or for that matter, a merchant to know the conditions which exist, the laws which prevail, the customs which flourish, and the tastes which rule in the hundreds of markets the world over? Certain general conditions are well-known to him, but they only serve to strengthen in him the belief that if he were possessed of specific information he could turn it to profitable use. Where will he obtain that knowledge, where can he be told of the physical qualities which his wares must possess if they are to enter fields already occupied, countries where tastes have been formed? How can the busy manufacturer leave his plant in Connecticut or Pennsylvania to find out the prejudices, the tastes, the predilections of possible customers in the four corners of the globe? And yet, it is just this manufacturer who is by nature and by surroundings often best qualified to furnish the wants of those foreign customers, but who, owing to the very nature of the conditions under which he grew up, is less acquainted with those foreign customers than any of his possible rivals! The American manufacturer can best supply the wants of foreign markets and he is the most ignorant of all about them. For centuries the mills and workshops of Europe have been supplying the ends of the world with their output; their owners and their agents have scoured the earth for information and have created tastes for their products. Whilst the shops and factories of this country were busy keeping pace with the magnificent growth of this new country, Europe was already disposing of its surplus, and when production began to cope with the home demand the ingenuity and time of the American manufacturer were centered in filling a bigger share of his domestic demand, in pleasing a bigger community of his fellow-countrymen. In time his prolific mills and shops proved too quick for even the active demand of the consumers of this country. There came a period of idleness, followed by further periods of inactivity; the glut of commodities had been produced, the fires were put out and

the mills shut down. But it needed but a little observation to discover that periods of domestic depression were often synchronous with a strong demand for the very same goods abroad—foreign traders had snatched at the goods on his overburdened bargain-counter. The desire grew strong to sell to the foreign consumer. And with this desire there came the discovery that he was ignorant of the foreign consumer's whereabouts, tastes, and wishes. It is to furnish him with this knowledge that the Philadelphia Commercial Museum exists, and it is through this institution that he is rapidly obtaining that knowledge and experience which has been acquired by his European rival through long years of slow, plodding, expensive experiment. How did this institution come to do this work?

In the first place there was no "institution;" there was but Dr. William P. Wilson and an amanuensis. He secured the active co-operation of the late Dr. William Pepper, himself a man of remarkable endowments, to carry out those ideas of commercial enlightenment which were shared in common and the dissemination of which were to prove of such vast utility to the commercial interests of this country. The first efforts of Dr. Pepper and Dr. Wilson were directed towards obtaining local support for and stimulating local interest in the task which they had set themselves to perform. In this they were eminently successful. Their next venture was to prevent the dispersion of the collection of natural products of commercial interest which had been brought from the ends of the world to the Chicago World's Fair. They not only succeeded in this, but they also found a place for them in an immense building composed of disused offices which the Pennsylvania Railway Company generously gave for a number of years at a nominal rent. The fibers, wools, hides, gums, oils, timbers, minerals, seeds, and the rest of the products were classified scientifically, presented in monographic and geographic groups, inscribed with the basic information which could cover them in a general way, and the result was the most interesting and instructive collection of commercially useful products ever made accessible to the public. A museum of commercial products had been created. It formed the nucleus of a most remarkable growth. The exhibits awakened interest, questions began to be asked about them, and answers were given freely. The public of Philadelphia, proud of the possession of such a valuable collection, voted money for its maintenance and extension. The desire for information regarding these commercial products grew

to such extent that even the wide knowledge of its assemble could not always give the latest information which might be available concerning them. It was necessary to obtain information from abroad regarding them, and an active foreign correspondence got under way. This was supplemented by the organization of a library of commercial publications, from which many data were procured. The Philadelphia Commercial Museum began to be known in a general way as an authority on foreign products of commercial interest. Then came the stray inquiry, not regarding the natural product, but the foreign manufactured article and its disposal. The Bureau of Information had received its first inquiry and had been set in motion. Little by little, with much groping, the work of the bureau was extended. It grew so quickly that it soon surpassed in magnitude the original "Museum." It was soon found that the original conception had undergone the quantitative modifications which finally had produced a qualitative change. And the "Museum" began to work in the commercial world changes similar to those which the introduction of steam had produced in the industrial world. The merchant, and especially the manufacturer, began to hear of the institution which was specially equipped to furnish that knowledge which they in vain had sought—they had now the help of a skilled instructor. The schoolmaster had literally gone abroad for books containing any information of direct use to the exporter—for periodicals, pamphlets, consular reports, government statistics, chamber of commerce reports, and all the literary output which could be of avail in building up a knowledge of commercial matters in all countries. The commercial library of the Commercial Museum had been started. A staff of librarians and cataloguers was gradually shaping into tangible units that which had been a scattered mass of details, lost in all corners of the globe, hidden behind the intricacies of the dozen languages of international trade. Every fact worth knowing, whether now or later, was seized upon. The card-index system, with its manifold cross-references, did the rest. "Cabots" could be found under "Textiles," as well as under Turkey, subsection "Smyrna," the town importing the article. In the same way every article or paragraph appearing in any of the hundreds of publications regularly received from all parts of the globe which could possibly serve as a basis of information useful to any class of commercial men or manufacturers was recorded in the way most accessible for future reference, was made available for use on simple request and were evidence of *bona fides*.

Soon it was found that this service of commercial information was being appreciated by the various manufacturing interests of the country. It was a ready adviser on all matters appertaining to foreign trade. Where else in the United States could you learn at the shortest notice what shape of butcher's knife was preferred in Servia, or how tenpenny nails had to be wrapped up in order to suit the requirements of Beyrourh; whose brand of condensed milk was in favor in Colombo, or whose make of argicultural forks were being used in Argentina? Endless were the details which needed explanation before a manufacturer felt justified in making the expenditure incidental to initial efforts at export. Was it really true that the packing methods ordinarily used here would be useless if adopted for stoves going to Bogota? Was it a fact that cases for Buenos Ayres had to be marked on the side only, and if for Valparaiso marked with stencil only? Were musical instruments shipped to Mexico taxed at customs on the net or the gross or the legal weight? Was there any demand for oilcloth in Brazil? What would be the freight on forty brass bedsteads ordered from Rangoon? How would you write "Handle with care" in Russian? Could you do into English the annexed letter from Yokohama? What is the analysis of the coal furnished by the local mines at Cape Town? What is the freight rate on coal to that port? Was the demand in Brisbane chiefly for lubricating oils or lubricating greases?

There is no end to the catechism which was being formed by the manufacturers and shippers of this country. And to each the Commercial Museum gave its reply, and begged to "come again." In spite of the fact that the work was handicapped by lack of sufficient funds—for the city's appropriations were for the "coming fiscal year," in which time the Museum doubled its work—excellent results were being obtained. A staff of linguists and commercial experts was being brought together; agents were sent abroad to form co-operations and obtain information; foreign governments were being enrolled among the sympathizers, and chambers of commerce made active advisers in the work. Before long the Commercial Museum had grown so great, its resources and its equipment had increased so remarkably, that Dr. Wilson, the director, thought it possible to launch out more boldly. The Commercial Museum was destined to become not merely the passive, watchful servant, it was to be the alert, indefatigable adviser of the multifarious manufacturing interests of this country. It took the initiative, investigated trade conditions in all parts of the world,

noted opportunities and quickly called attention to the possibilities presented. It extended its service: for a nominal yearly payment (the cost of obtaining, ordering, and disseminating information) it began to offer to manufacturers all over the country specific detailed knowledge which was essential to the successful prosecution of an export business. The offer found a ready acceptance at the hands of the most enterprising and energetic manufacturers all over the country. This information was in the shape of an exhaustive report on the possibilities of and the method to be adopted for selling a specific article in a particular foreign market; for instance, sheep-shears in Wellington, New Zealand, or machine belting in Bombay. This report aimed to convey all necessary data under the following captions: Character and variety of the article already on the market the competition of which would have to be faced; names and addresses of the manufacturers now supplying the market, with special reference to those characteristics of their goods which had procured them favor; all available statistical information regarding the quantity imported, with reference to their countries of origin, declared values, etc.; prices of the article in question at the manufacturer's, and the terms of payment generally demanded of and granted by him; price at which the article is being sold by the importer to the consumers on the market in question; information regarding facilities of transportation and the relative shipping rates and charges between the American seaport and the market, as compared with the rates paid by rival countries; customs charges and regulations as to invoices, marking, declaration, etc.; recommendations as to wrapping, labeling, marking, and packing, as governed by climatic conditions, transportation facilities, and handling, etc.; names and addresses of the most reliable importers already trading in the article in question; the field of distribution controlled by the market under review; any useful supplementary information not included in any of the foregoing. It will be conceded that any manufacturer or shipper who was armed with the information given in such a regular monthly report was acquiring a fund of information which would be of great benefit in enabling him to embark upon a venture entirely new to him.

When the information given out by the Commercial Museum began to be acted upon, its sphere of utility was immediately greatly extended. For the American houses, in communicating with foreign merchants not infrequently mentioned that their efforts had been



directed by the Philadelphia Commercial Museum. The fame of this institution abroad was considerably magnified, especially when it became more generally known that the Museum was willing to give, free of charge, any desired information concerning the resources or industries of the United States. Here again this country's trade was benefited. Endless in number and variety were the enquiries which began to pour in on the Museum. Now it was a copy of a trade-mark which reached the Museum, with the request that the name of its owner should be given, thus inaugurating direct trade relationship instead of Hamburg or Liverpool mediation. Most frequently the names of manufacturers of certain specified articles were desired, generally coupled with the request that they should be asked to communicate with the enquirer. Not infrequently orders, or specifications of requirements were received, with the request that they be placed in the hands of suitable parties.

Soon after the Museum had become assured of the willingness and the strong desire to reciprocate kindnesses which animated its many correspondents abroad, the idea was conceived of organizing a systematic plan for the investigation of the moral and commercial reputation of the merchants all over the world who were actual or prospective correspondents of American houses. It was obvious that American manufacturers should be furnished reliable statements regarding not only the goods which could be disposed of in various parts of the world, but also concerning the houses to whom these articles might be offered without risk. This work was inaugurated and is still being vigorously pushed on. Results prove that the hopes which were entertained at the inception of the work were not delusive. Rapidly, yet surely and accurately, a mass of information has been obtained. It aims to cover as completely as possible the following particulars concerning a firm : exact style and address, specific list of articles imported and exported, telegraphic address and names of the cable codes used. This much had been generally obtained without difficulty from friendly correspondents in all regions. The information was corrected and supplemented, on direct request, by the persons interested. It is quite exceptional to meet with any refusal to supply this information, especially as after a lapse of time an unanswered first request is followed by a second and, if need be, a third. After knowing exactly the *nature* of a business conducted by a house, it became desirable to know more concerning the methods and principles by which the conduct

of the business was governed, as well as the pecuniary conditions of the house. Here it was that the Museum found cause to congratulate itself on its extensive connections and its warm friendship with the great banking institutions all over the world. It needed but the assurance that the information would be treated with all discretion and in perfect confidence. The banks were sensible and quick enough to perceive the advantage to themselves which would result from the introduction of American exporters only to such houses as were morally and financially sound. They gave what information they had to the Museum — moral reputation, business peculiarities, financial status. As this confidential matter pours into the Museum it is being recorded, checked, controlled, kept fresh by constant revision and corroborative testimony. As occasion arises, the moral or financial blacksheep, the defaulters, the bankrupts, the “lame ducks,” are quickly made known to all who might come in contact with them in the United States. The result is a reduction to a minimum of connections which might otherwise prove unsatisfactory. There is not a “shaky” house in Amsterdam or Smyrna or Bangkok from whom, at some time or other, the Museum has not saved some intended victim of a plausible letter written under a meretricious letter head.

Acting upon its primary principle of never waiting till its wares are stale before serving them up, the Museum has always put this information to use while it was fresh and “piping hot.” The following true copy of a statement sent out conveys a good idea of the form and substance of the information given :

### A. S. PATRIKIOS & Co.,

Constantinople,

Turkey-in-Europe.

Established in 1847.

Telegraphic address “Patrikios.” Codes: A1, ABC 4th edition.  
Branches at Ismid and Galata.

Bankers, commission merchants and real estate brokers.  
Importers : agricultural machinery, steam engines, cereals, flour, etc.  
Exporters : cereals, raw silk, silk cocoons, etc. Proprietors of steam mills.

Representatives at Ismid for the “Banque Imperial Ottomane,”  
Constantinople, Turkey-in-Europe.

It will be seen that Messrs. A. S. Patrikios & Co. import agricultural machinery, steam engines, cereals, flour, etc. Every United States manufacturer who has informed the Museum that he is desirous of establishing foreign connections, who manufactures agricultural machinery, steam engines, etc., will receive at frequent intervals such cards as the above, giving particulars of the business conducted by a possible customer. The circulation of the information is a guarantee of the reliability of the firm therein described. It will be readily understood that with such information in hand, there is no reasonable excuse why overtures should not be made to the foreign house, and why these should not lead to the acquisition of a share of that firm's business. As a matter of fact, this special service of the Museum has borne excellent fruit. After all, half the trouble of selling is over when once you know for certain on whom you may concentrate your efforts, whom you must avoid, in whom you may place confidence and from whom you must exact "cash against Bills of Lading."

It will be seen, then, that the Museum's work has been manifold in character yet with a single end. The American manufacturer has been told in a precise, specific way where he may sell his wares, to whom he may sell them, how he can best realize his intentions. It is evident that the amount of work involved is something enormous. Letters in a dozen languages have to be deciphered, and typewritten answers written, a thousand periodicals have to be searched and the information obtained indexed and cross-indexed; thousands of foreign houses must be investigated and reported upon. All this takes time, money, hard work, and executive ability.

And no sooner does the performance of one branch of work seem to have approached that smoothness and clearness of execution which stamps it as humanly perfect, than a new field for ingenuity, a new factor in furthering international trade interests is discovered and brought into play. It goes through the evolutionary process which has characterized all phases of development in the Museum's work. The idea is applied, the first tentative efforts are made, faults are discovered, remedies introduced, the drawbacks eliminated, improvements made until the crude idea finally finds expression in another perfect wheel in the great mechanism of foreign trade intelligence. Two of these latest additions to the Museum's efforts may be instanced: the "rush-news" service and the "photographic information." The former consists in making immediately available for use any paragraph of news

which may come in with the mail from a certain part of the world. For instance, the Australian mail has just brought the papers from the Antipodes. The newspapers are searched, and all items which call for prompt attention are immediately dealt with by a corps of experts devoted to that special work, supplemented in their efforts by others of the foreign staff. It may be a specification of government supplies for which tenders must be delivered by a certain date; it may be the decision of a deliberative body to sanction the building of a certain railway, the construction of an aqueduct, the dredging of a harbor; or it may be the announcement of the heavy defalcations of the treasurer of an important bank. As quickly as can be, the news is spread and the exporters are made aware of that which interests them. If an appropriation has been made for railway extension or for the improvement of equipment, the news goes to the maker of locomotives, of rails, of steam fittings; in short, to everyone who is directly interested. Sometimes the news has just been received direct from the agent on the spot: more frequently the Museum is ahead of him, but generally it compensates for his unpardonable omissions to report.

The need of the photographic service became obvious on the day when it was found that there were limits to the Museum's descriptive powers. However well a machine or the special function demanded of it might be portrayed in words, there was often something lacking about the description which needed to be supplied. The camera came to the rescue; so that now there is no doubt left as to the exact character of a plow used in a particular country. The Museum's agent sends a picture of the article most in demand—the fancy articles and the staple goods. The reproduction of the picture, the emphasizing of detail, in fact, all the rest is done in the studios of the Museum under the care of an expert photographer. And even were no picture of an imported article can be obtained, the work it has to perform can be pictured so that the manufacturer knows exactly what is expected of him. A glance at the paddy fields of the Mekong Valley before the floods and during the floods, for instance, is sufficient to show that only a special form of plow can be used on these rice fields.

The most exact of sciences, chemistry, has been brought to the assistance of the Museum. Its magnificently equipped and intelligently conducted laboratories have already rendered invaluable service to the American manufacturer desirous of knowing the secrets of his foreign rival's wares: the percentage of cotton in the "pure linen"

goods, of maize in the "wheaten flour," of shrinkage in manufacturing. Still more useful have been the verdicts pronounced by it concerning the properties and values of natural products sent from all parts of the globe. How much money has not been saved by the statements that certain "immense silver deposits" contained nothing more valuable than iron pyrites; that certain gums were useless for the manufacture of varnish; that certain caoutchouc contained so much water? If the work done by the laboratories of the Commercial Museum had not been immediately productive of such big results as have followed on the efforts of its less "scientific" departments, it is a source of consolation to know that what it has done has been admirably done, and that, at any moment it may accomplish that for which the world could never cease to be indebted and grateful.

W. COLGROVE BETTS.

PHILADELPHIA.